

U.S. Admits

But Hedges on Cause

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The Pentagon yesterday backed away from previous denials and acknowledged that U.S. bombs may have done "some limited accidental damage" to the large Bachmai Hospital near Hanoi during intensive air raids in recent weeks.

Pentagon spokesman Jerry W. Friedheim, however, stopped short of saying that the damage to the hospital and to Hanoi's Gialam commercial airport had definitely been caused by U.S. bombs.

He told newsmen the Pentagon still didn't know exactly what hit those civilian areas, and once again raised the possibility that the damage might have been caused by downed U.S. planes crashing into the city or from North Vietnamese air defense missiles falling back to earth.

Nevertheless, Friedheim's statement represented a turnabout from two previous occasions, last Wednesday and Friday, when he denied having knowledge of any damage to the Bachmai hospital as had been claimed by Radio Hanoi and by

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a contingent of American anti-war activists visiting the North Vietnamese capital.

At one point a week ago, Friedheim said flatly that "we have not struck a large, 1,000-bed civilian hospital, No."

This weekend, American television networks showed film, supplied and edited by the North Vietnamese, of the damage to the Bachmai hospital.

Friedheim declined to say exactly when or how the Pentagon received its information that the hospital had in fact been damaged, but he indicated it was after his denials.

Meanwhile, a group of war critics including former Attorney General Ramsey Clark and black Georgia legislator Julian Bond announced plans here to raise \$3 million to rebuild the hospital.

Working through an organization called Medical Aid for Indochina, Inc., in Cambridge, Mass., they said money and materials would be channeled to Hanoi through the North Vietnamese Red Cross.

Yesterday's formal Pentagon statement said "we regret any such accidental damage from whatever source, but we reiterate that our strikes have been targeted only at military targets." Friedheim said that both the hospital and the airport are located about

"several hundred yards" from military targets that were hit.

The Gialam airport, which French correspondents in Hanoi had reported hit as early as Dec. 21, is near the Gialam railroad yards, and the hospital—some three miles from the center of Hanoi—is on the fringes of what the Pentagon describes as the Bachmai military complex, including Army barracks, airfield, communications and transportation facilities.

Friedheim said both military targets were struck, by both B-52s and tactical fighter-bombers. Bombing critics contend that B-52s cannot carry out precision bombing within hundreds of yards when under intensive anti-aircraft fire.

Friedheim asserted that it was known that there was a large facility at Bachmai which "the enemy claimed was a hospital from time to time."*

The Pentagon spokesman consistently declined to define what he meant by "limited damage" but repudiated char-

* See Oswald Johnston,
Wx Star-News

15 Jan 73, this file.

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acterizations of "total destruction" to the hospital made by the antiwar group that visited Hanoi.

"Our information does not square with Hanoi's propaganda claims of massive destruction at these sites," he said. Some Pentagon aides suggested privately that they believed the North Vietnamese films had only focused on a small part of the hospital.

At a press conference called by critics of the bombing to announce plans to rebuild the hospital, spokesmen variously described Bachmai hospital as "razed" and "totally destroyed."

Yale Divinity School chaplain Michael Allen, one of the four Americans who recently returned from Hanoi, said he personally viewed the hospital on the most recent date it was hit, Dec. 22, and it was "pretty much totally destroyed."

"The walls were still standing in some places," he said, "but there was nothing inside."

Pressed for details on casualties, Allen said North Vietnamese officials were "very, very guarded about their statistics," and "we were never allowed to see bombed sites while there were still human bodies there."

Hanoi has reported at least 25 hospital staff members were killed but no patients were killed, Allen said.

Agence France-Presse, the French news agency, has reported about 300 patients in Bachmai "during resumption of the air raids."

Asked why no patients were reported killed in the hospital complex described as "totally destroyed," Allen said after the press conference that it was his understanding that all or most of the patients had been evacuated to shelters before the bombing.

Other critics who condemned the bombing policy at the press conference included Bond, Bishop John Wesley Lord of the United Methodist Church, Medical Aid for Indochina co-chairman Charles Magraw, Gold Star mother Patricia Simon of Newton, Mass., and Charles Janeway.

Bond called the bombing "incredible carnage" and accused the Nixon administration of "criminally insane acts."

Clark said more than \$250,

000 has already been contributed to the Bachmai reconstruction fund. Magraw said details for the rebuilding job have not been developed yet.

In October, the Pentagon confirmed that it had accidentally hit the French embassy in Hanoi with a stray bomb, after first raising the possibility that some fallen North Vietnamese ~~missile~~ may have caused the damage.

Hospital Hit.

Panhandle Bombed 1973

SAIGON, Jan. 2 (AP)—U.S. bombers resumed attacks on North Vietnam's southern panhandle Tuesday after a 36-hour halt in the air strikes for the New Year holiday.

The U.S. command said the bombing halt remained in effect above the 20th parallel, an area that includes the major cities of Hanoi and Haiphong.

Bombing above the 20th parallel was ordered stopped Saturday by President Nixon, a move tied to the resumption Monday of the Paris peace talks.

In a brief communique, the U.S. command said: "U.S. air crews resumed operations over North Vietnam at 1300 hours today after a 36-hour case-fire." For reasons of security, the command said no other details of the strikes would be made available.

Other U.S. officials said, however, the U.S. bombers were hitting supply routes in the panhandle in an effort to stop North Vietnam's annual dry season drive to bring men and materiel into South Vietnam across the Demilitarized Zone and through Laos.

See INDOCHINA. A**